

WOJAC World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries

About the Organization

WOJAC - the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries, was founded in 1975 in Paris by leaders of Immigrants' Associations and communities of Jews originating from Arab countries in Israel and the Diaspora, headed by former Cabinet Minister and Member of Knesset Mordechai Ben-Porat, and the late Leon Tamman, then Chairman of the Sephardi Federation in Great Britain and one of the world leaders of Jews from Arab countries. Mr. Ben-Porat's initiative for the establishment of the Organization was motivated on the one hand, by the distress of the Jews remaining in Arab countries who suffered from persecution, imprisonment and executions, and, on the other hand, by need to react to the overwhelming importance given to the issue of the Palestinian refugees in world public opinion. The initiators of WOJAC thought that, since no Jewish organization in Israel or the Diaspora had done it before, the time had come to introduce to the world the forgotten case of the Jews who had been forced to leave Arab countries and abandon all they had - vast communal and private property, invaluable spiritual and material assets accumulated over many generations that was plundered, frozen or expropriated. To present their legitimate rights and claims it was decided to establish a roof-organization whose constituency are over one million Jews originating from Arab countries and their descendants now living in Israel and throughout the world, with the following objectives:

- To represent the Jews originating from Arab countries in Israel and the Diaspora, raise and establish their just case nationally and internationally - before governments, public institutions, organizations, and individuals and in the framework of the political negotiations;
- To achieve recognition of their legitimate rights and work for the realization of their personal and collective claims against their countries of origin, and to increase the awareness of policy-makers and public opinion in Israel and worldwide of this issue;
- To collect, register and compile data of the claims for compensation for Jewish property lost in Arab countries, in order to save it from oblivion;
- To achieve universal recognition of the fact that a 'de facto' exchange of population has occurred in the Middle East between Jews who left Arab countries as refugees and Arab refugees from Israel; To demand that the rights and claims of Jews from Arab countries be raised in the political negotiations with the representatives of the Arab states and the Palestinian Arabs and insist that they constitute an inseparable part of any agreement on the permanent status in the Middle East.

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As Deputy Knesset Speaker at the time, Mr. Ben-Porat tabled a motion at the House on the issue of "the Legitimate Rights of Jews originating from Arab Countries". As a member of the Israel Permanent Mission to the United Nations in 1977, he delivered a statement on the subject of refugees in the Middle East from the Rostrum of the U.N. General Assembly.

Legal Status:

WOOAC is a voluntary, international, independent, a political organization, recognized by the United Nations as an N.G.O. Non-Governmental Organization associated with the U.N. D.P.I. Department of Public Information. It is a non-profit organization, recognized as a public institution, registered as an Amotha[?] on May 16, 1984. Its nature is representative and democratic, and it operates through its elected institutions:

The International bodies are:

- The General Assembly, which elects/ratifies the election of the institutions of the Organization;
- The World Executive, whose members serve as the representatives of the Organization in the Diaspora, in their respective countries;* the Chairman of the World Executive Mr. Oved Benozair, serves also as head of the Israel Executive and the Israel Main Office; - The World Presidium, based on the joint representation of Israel and the Diaspora; the Chairman of the World Presidium is former Cabinet Minister and Member of Knesset Advocate Moshe Shachal from Tel-Aviv.

The bodies operating in Israel:

- The National Council, the Israel Executive, and the Executive Board. The Secretary-General of the Organization is Mr. Shimon Avizemer. Executive Secretary: Ms. Mi a Bar-Cohen.
- In addition to its Head Office in Tel-Aviv, WOJAC has branches in several European countries, as well as in North America, Central and South America, and Australia, headed by the members of the World Executive.

Membership is open to any Jew originating from an Arab or Islamic country and his descendants, as well as to any. person, Jewish and non-Jewish, identifying with the aims of the Organization.

Funding: WOJAC's political and information activity has been drawing for years almost entirely on a very limited allocation of public funds from the national institutions and the dedicated work of volunteers. The Organization has no source of income other than i _•. public budgetary allocation; it is not supported by private enterprises, either local or foreign, in order to prevent undesirable influence on its policy and operation and to preserve it as an independent, a-political organization serving only national goals.

WOJAC's Principles and Goals

The Organization draws attention to historical facts:

- The Jewish entity as a nation, religion and culture preceded all others in the Middle East, notably in the Land of Israel, by thousands of years and it constitutes an uninterrupted presence up to the modern Era. There were large, flourishing Jewish communities in the region already 1,000 years prior to the Advent of Islam and more than 2,500 years before the birth of the modern Arab states, contrary to the unfounded argument that Jews are a so-called foreign invader in the region who have recently arrived in Eretz-Yisrael following the establishment of the Zionist movement.
- Following the rise of Islam in the 7th Century CE, the Jews lived in Arab countries as a religious minority in the inferior and restrictive status of "protected people" ('dhimmi'). Except for certain periods (such as the "Golden Age"), Jews were discriminated against by the Arab authorities (contrary to the Arab description of Arab-Jewish co-existence in Arab countries as idyllic), were forced to live in segregated quarters and pay the poll tax ('Jizya'). Despite their distress, Jews contributed a great deal to the economic, scientific, political, spiritual, and cultural development of the entire region and of the Arab countries in which they resided for thousands of years.
- Political developments in the Middle East in the 20th Century, notably the increase of Arab nationalism and the establishment of independent Arab states and the war they subsequently declared in 1948 against the newborn State of Israel, provoked serious aggravation of the situation of Jews in Arab countries: their human and civil rights were withdrawn[^] their property was expropriated, anti-Jewish riots broke out with the tacit consent of the authorities. The intensification of persecution, arrests, executions, dispossession, and mass-expulsion compelled over 850,000 Jews out of the million who resided in Arab countries at the end of 1947 to hasten their emigration 'en masse' from their countries of residence, most of them destitute. About 600,000 of them found a safe haven in the newly-born State of Israel while it was fighting for its survival and were absorbed and rehabilitated; the rest emigrated to other countries all over the world. Simultaneously, some 590,000 Palestinian Arabs left Israel, mostly for the neighbouring countries.
- The shift of those two major groups of Jewish and Arab refugees brought about a 'de facto'¹ exchange of population in the Middle East - a common universal phenomenon occurring in the wake of wars, especially in the 20th Century, as, for example, between Greeks and Turks, Germans from former German zones and from East Germany, Moslems from India and Hindus from Pakistan etc.

Based on these facts, WOJAC has set for itself the following principles and goals:

- The demand for international recognition of the 'de facto' exchange of population that occurred in the Middle East between Jews who left Arab countries and Palestinian Arabs who left Israel
 - which fact constitutes the basic argument refuting the Arab claim for "the right of return".

- The demand for recognition of the legitimate rights of the Jews from Arab countries and their private and collective claims for the loss of life and invaluable spiritual and material assets - vast communal and private property expropriated and abandoned in those countries,
- The demand that the rights and claims of Jews from Arab countries be raised in the political negotiations with the representatives of the Arab states and the Palestinian Arabs and insist they constitute an inseparable part of any settlement that will be agreed upon in framework of the permanent status in the region.
- The demand that the representatives of the Jews from Arab countries be included in the Multi-lateral Committees, notably the Committee on Refugees, since, as former refugees from Arab countries, they are best qualified to serve as authentic spokesmen of the Jews from Arab countries and stand up for them as "refugees versus refugees"; furthermore, by dint of their close acquaintance with the Arab peoples, they can help to establish a dialogue and promote understanding between the negotiating parties and thereby contribute to the advancement of the peace process.

Activity: Areas of Activity, History, Achievements

For the advancement of the principles and goals WOJAC has set for itself, the Organization has engaged since its establishment in in the following areas of activity:

- a) Administrative and Representative Issues: WOJAC joins together Jews originating from Arab countries living in Israel and other countries, as individuals as well as organizations of immigrants from those countries, whose representatives are members of the Executive of the Organization, for the purpose of representing them, defending and advancing their interests and presenting and establishing their legitimate rights and claims nationally and internationally and in the political negotiations.
The Organization endeavors, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, to collect, register and document data concerning Jewish communal and private property left in Arab countries and compile the claims of the Jews from Arab countries for compensation for the loss of this property, in order to help to raise those claims and realize them in the framework of the political negotiations.
- b) Political and information Activity: Over the years WOJAC has conducted an extensive information campaign: The Organization published information leaflets and brochures in several languages (Hebrew, English, Arabic, French and Spanish), and has initiated and assisted in the preparation and publication of research papers and books on issues pertaining to the history of Jewish communities in Arab countries - their development, their distress in adverse conditions of discrimination and persecution, the attitude of the Arab authorities towards the Jewish minority, their exodus from Arab countries, the situation of the remnant of the communities left in those states, etc, A film was prepared entitled "To Be A Jew in Arab Lands", as well as two photographic exhibitions about the life of the Jews in Arab countries, which were displayed in the framework of WOJAC's international conferences.

Information material was distributed among Israeli delegations abroad and was used by them in their information campaign; information was delivered also to policy-makers, government

and national institutions, academic institutions, researchers, students, organizations and individuals upon their request. Representatives of the Organization hold meetings with statesmen in Israel and abroad, with foreign diplomats and representatives of the local and foreign media. WOJAC maintains contact with representatives of the official institutions - Cabinet Ministers, Members of Knesset, and senior officials at Government Offices and the Jewish Agency.

Lecturers have been sent out on behalf of the Organization and held hundreds of lectures before Jewish and non-Jewish leaders (e.g. heads of churches, Afro-American leaders, trade union leaders and others) organizations, social circles and communal centers in Europe and the U.S. In Israel, the issue of WOJAC was communicated to pupils, teachers and educators as well as to Foreign Ministry cadets, and groups of I.D.F. soldiers and commanders.

Three international conferences were successfully held in Paris (the Founding Conference, 1975), London (1983) and Washington (1987) with the participation of senior statesmen from the hosting countries - cabinet ministers, senators, congressmen and members of parliaments, Jewish and non-Jewish public figures, especially those originating from Arab countries and guests from many states.

National conventions were held with the participation of WOJAC representatives and activists, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Knesset, public and academe figures, foreign diplomats, hundreds of invitees from Israel and abroad and media representatives.

The Organization has held also seminars and symposia with the participation of eminent lecturers and experts with the view of discussing and clarifying political, legal and other subjects regarding the issue of Jews from Arab countries.

In its status as an independent, non-governmental organization, WOJAC sent delegates to international forays, such as the U.N. Conferences on Women in Copenhagen and later in Nairobi; the World N.G.O. Conference on Human Rights in Vienna; WOJAC representatives participated in the prestigious forum for political debates - the Council for Foreign Relations in New York, where they confronted Palestinian academics in a public debate on the demographic and humanitarian aspects of the issue of Middle East Refugees, attended by State Department officials and researchers, followed by the publication in the U.S. of a research paper on the solution of the refugee problem in the Middle East.

The rights of Jews from Arab countries is one of the most forceful arguments to have been brought up by the State of Israel. WOJAC's persistent information activity over the years created and increased awareness of policy-makers, national and international organizations and public opinion in Israel and worldwide of the Jewish refugee^ problem in the Middle East. As representative of the Jews who left Arab countries as refugees as from 1948 and onwards and became Israeli citizens; WOJAC constitutes the only organized factor that can present political, economic and moral counterclaims to those of the Palestinian refugees and refute their demand for "the right of return". Due to this argument, heads of Arab states called on the Jews to return to their countries of origin, to which the delegates of WOJAC responded: "We shall not go back to the prisons of Damascus, nor to the gallows of Baghdad..."

WOJAC's efforts have led to the universal understanding and recognition that every agreement towards a permanent settlement with the Palestinians and true peace with the Arab states would be unacceptable and morally invalid if it did not include recognition also of the rights and claims of the Jews from Arab countries and redress of the historical injustice done to them.

The direct and indirect effect of WOJAC's activity on international agreements can be found in the following documents and declarations:

Then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said in 1975:

"This conference is first and foremost an attempt to remedy the injustice done to hundreds of thousands of Jews who were forced to flee from Arab countries as destitute refugees for no fault of their own other than the fact that they were Jews. The State of Israel, as a Jewish state and as a state that granted refuge, freedom and a home to the majority of these our brethren, cannot but welcome this human effort and support the realization of the objectives of the conference... I hope its goals will gain the moral and practical support of everyone that holds the values of justice and honesty close at heart".

The just cause of WOJAC is confirmed also by the more balanced version of Security Council Resolution 242 referring to a!1 Middle East refugees, Arabs and Jews alike; in the Working Paper signed between the U.S. and Israel on October 5, 1977, by President Carter and Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan; in paragraph (8) of the Israel-Egypt Peace Agreement regarding mutual claims; then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir included WOJAC's principles in his address at the opening of the Madrid Peace Talks in 1991. The claims of Jews from Arab countries were brought up for debate several times by the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Security and at the Knesset Plenary, where the issue won the support of 100 out of the 120 members of the House. The subject of WOJAC was raised at the American House of Representatives following the Third International Conference in Washington in 1987 and gained the recognition of senators and congressmen. Former Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, then Ambassador of Israel to the U.N., said, 'inter alia' in his address to the Washington Conference:

"Jewish communities which existed for millennia were forced out of their ancestral homes virtually overnight. Jews from Arab lands left behind homes, lands, fortunes, businesses, possessions...It was a mistake not to make their plight a top priority in our foreign policy;... it was a mistake not to demand compensation for their losses and their suffering. But these mistakes can still be rectified... In any settlement with the Arab regimes, their sacrifices and tragedies must be reckoned with. If we do not insist on this, we shall compound our past mistakes, and sin not only against them, but against the security and the future of the State of Israel. I commend WOJAC for giving us the compass and showing us the way to do the right thing."

An important recent achievement, reached as a result of consistent efforts by representatives of the State of Israel to advance those principles in the framework of the political negotiations, is the historical declaration of U.S. President Bill Clinton on 28.7.2000, following the Summit Camp David Conference:

"..if there is an Agreement... there will have to be some sort of international fund set up for the refugees. There is, I think, some interest - interest on both sides - in also having a fund which compensates the Israelis who were made refugees by the war which occurred after the birth of the State of Israel. Israel is full of people - Jewish people who lived in Arab countries who came to Israel because they were made refugees in their own land. And that's another piece of good news I think I can reveal out of the Summit - the Palestinians said they thought those people should be eligible for compensation as well. We will set up a fund and we will contribute. I... asked the Europeans and the Japanese to contribute as well..."

Jewish and Arab Refugees

Prior to the establishment of WOJAC, world public opinion was familiar with the term "legitimate rights" only with regard to the Palestinian Arab refugees as a result of massive Arab propaganda. The world was unaware and knew nothing of the other side of the Middle East refugee problem which started following the war launched by the Arab states against Israel in 1948 - the problem of the Jews who left Arab countries as refugees.

Throughout the ages, Jews suffered discrimination and persecution in Arab lands. They always longed for Zion and kept waiting for the opportune moment when free immigration to Eretz-Yisrael would be possible, and in some countries there was also Zionist activity that led to 'Aliya'. But what finally caused their exodus 'en masse' from their countries of origin was the considerable aggravation of their situation, a process which occurred mainly between 1948 and the 1960's, subsequent to a wave of Arab nationalism and the establishment of sovereign Arab states in the 20th century: Deprivation of human and civil rights, expropriation, increase of arrests, exiles, executions, riots and attacks on life and property made the existence of Jews in Arab countries intolerable. Furthermore: In the archives recently opened to the public in Great Britain, the U.S. and Israel, evidence is accumulating to the effect that the Arab states engaged in intentional and coordinated policy with the view of expelling the Jews.

Thus over 850,000 Jews were turned into refugees by every international criterion: They were compelled to leave the countries of their fathers and forefathers hastily and abandon all their possessions - vast communal and private property accumulated over many generations of productive work. In a span of a few years, only some thirty thousand remained out of nearly one million Jews that lived in Arab countries at the end of 1947, and in states like Syria and Yemen those who remained were kept hostage until recently.

Harsh evidence of the maltreatment of the Jews by the Arab states is manifest in an article published by Sabri Jiryis in the Lebanese Daily "Al Nahar" on May 15, 1975:

"This is not the place to describe how the Jews were removed from Arab countries where they had lived for centuries; how they were ignominiously expelled after their property had been confiscated or acquired at a nominal sum.. It is impossible to justify the matter by saying that it was the past regimes in the Arab world, aided by the Imperialist Power which worked in coordination with Zionism that did it... The historical results ensuing from such an operation cannot be wiped out by such simple pretexts... There is no need to say that the problem of those Arab Jews and their transfer to Israel is not merely

theoretical, at least as far as the Palestinians are concerned. It has a very practical repercussion on the future of the Palestinian problem."

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 made it possible for 600,000 of the Jews who left Arab countries to come to this country, where they found a safe haven, and in spite of tremendous difficulties, especially in the early years of the State's existence, they were absorbed and rehabilitated and turned from refugees into equal citizens. Their absorption and rehabilitation were financed by the Government of Israel, which spent billions of Dollars for this purpose, and by their brethren in Israel and the Diapora. They had no support from the international community and have never been compensated for the suffering, the loss of life and the plunder and expropriation of property in Arab countries, and many of them still live, fifty years later, in severe economic difficulties,

Some 590,000 Arab refugees left the State of Israel for the neighboring Arab states in 1948 - a number similar to that of the Jews who came from Arab countries to Israel. But at this point the symmetry between the two refugee groups ends: While the absorption of the Jewish refugees was funded by their brethren in Israel and the Diaspora, Arab countries neither absorbed nor rehabilitated their refugee brethren but left them in camps without a minimum of decent living condition and exploited their painful human problem in their political and information campaign against Israel. The rich oil-producing Arab countries contributed over the years only negligible sums to the assistance of these refugees and they were supported mainly by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA), which contributed its own share to perpetuate this problem. An odd case in point occurred in 1971 when Israel attempted to alleviate the distress of the refugees in the Gaza Strip, where conditions of destitution and density of the camp population were especially severe, by building new housing near the camps and compensating those who agreed to move to the new living quarters and give up their old home in the camp. This initiative was stultified when the U.N., in its Resolution of 4.11.1976 called upon Israel to return the refugees immediately to the camps that had been evacuated and to avoid further evacuation of refugees and demolition of their old camp homes.

The international community is beginning to recognize belatedly that also the Jews who left Arab countries and arrived in Israel as refugees have legitimate rights that must be acknowledged and restituted, due to the persistent efforts of the leaders of WOJAC to present a balanced picture of the refugee problem in the region. A case in point is the appearance at the UN General Assembly of the first Chairman of the Organization, Mr. Mordechai Ben-Porat, then Member of Knesset who later became Cabinet Minister and was himself a refugee from Iraq.

Over the years, the effect of the acknowledgment of this issue is manifested itself in various international fora: The Working Paper of October 5, 1977, which constituted an agreement between Israel and the U.S. , states: "The solution of the problem of the Jewish refugees and the Arab refugees will be in accordance with terms to be agreed upon..." Following this Agreement, President Carter announced in a press conference on October 27, 1977: "Well, the Palestinians have rights... Obviously, there are Jewish refugees also... They have the same rights as others do." Special importance is attributed to the balanced version of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, the widely accepted basis for any settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, which states clearly "the necessity for a just settlement of the refugee problem" as an essential precondition for the

establishment of a "just and lasting peace." It specifically refers to the "refugee problem" and not to the "Arab refugee problem", namely: Arab and Jewish refugees alike.

The rights of Jews from Arab countries and their collective and personal claims against Arab countries constitute, undoubtedly, a political, moral and economic counterclaim to the demands of the Palestinian Arab refugees. The Arabs claim compensation for their property left in the State of Israel. This is the property of a society that was mainly agrarian and was formed in Eretz-Yisrael for the most part not earlier than the beginning of the 20th century. The Jews, on the other hand, claim compensation for communal and private property abandoned in Arab countries whose value is many-fold larger, since those extensive material and spiritual assets belonged to flourishing, mostly urban communities that were hundreds and sometimes thousands of years old, and their value cannot be overestimated. The Palestinian claim for the "right of return" is countered by the irrefutable historical fact of the 'de facto' exchange of population that has occurred between the Arab refugees who left Israel and the Jewish refugees who left Arab countries and were absorbed in Israel.

It is therefore essential to discuss the claims of both parties - the Jewish refugees as well as the Arab refugees - in the framework of the political negotiations and resolve them in framework of the agreement on the permanent status in the Middle East.

A very important step towards this goal was the declaration of U.S. President Bill Clinton in July 2000, which places on the same level

The right of the Palestinian refugees and the right of the Jews from Arab countries for compensation on the loss of their property, as well as recognition on the part of the Palestinians that the Jews from Arab countries, too, have this right: "There will have to be some sort of international fund set up for the refugees. There is... some interest -interest on both sides - in also having a fund which compensates the Israelis who were made refugees by the war which occurred after the birth of the State of Israel. Israel is full of people - Jewish people who came to Israel because they were made refugees in their own land... And that's another piece of good news I think I can reveal out of the Summit - the Palestinians said they thought those people should be eligible for compensation as well."

Jewish Property Left in Arab Countries and the Claim for Compensation

Immeasurable spiritual and material assets were accumulated over hundreds and thousands of years of life and productive activity of Jews in Arab countries. This communal and private property was lost, for the most part, when it was frozen and expropriated by the authorities, plundered, set on fire and destroyed by rioting mobs and finally abandoned in its entirety when hundreds of thousands of Jews were compelled to get hastily out of their countries of residence, leaving behind all their assets, which were either taken from them or which they were forced to sell at a nominal price or abandon when they were expelled or escaped in the dead of night.

The State of Israel made a tremendous effort to absorb and rehabilitate those destitute refugees who came to it in its early years with the poor means at the country's disposal and with the assistance of Jewish communities worldwide. But they have never been compensated for being

dispossessed and deprived of their communal, private, spiritual and material assets, and many of them still, live in conditions of inferior dwelling and economic distress. The Israel Governments have been aware of this issue since the days of the mass immigration from Arab countries, but only after the Yom Kippur War, with the incipient talks with Egypt on issues concerning refugees, property and compensation and following the establishment of WOJAC, whose leaders launched a campaign on the rights and claims of Jews from Arab countries and raised them from the rostra of the United Nations and the Knesset and before policy-makers in Israel and worldwide, there grew an awareness of the necessity, from the political, moral and economic point of view, to claim compensation for the Jewish property in Arab countries as an inseparable part of the negotiations on peace agreements in the Middle East, just as the Palestinian Arabs claim compensation for their property left in Israel. Former Minister of Justice, Haim Tsadok, said at the Knesset on 14.1.1976:

The position of the Government of Israel in the matter of Jewish property in Arab countries has been clear all along. Our position is that in the framework of negotiations on a peace agreement Israel will claim full compensation for the property and rights of Jews originating from Arab countries living in Israel, and this compensation must be part of any peace agreement with the Arab countries."

The Prime Minister at the time, Menachem Begin, declared from the rostrum of the Knesset on February 7, 1979:

Also the problem of the property of the Jews that was expropriated in Arab states, and not just in one state, has been and will be raised in all the negotiations. It was also brought up in the negotiations between us and Egypt, when we agreed that Claims Committee would be established and each party would submit its claims, and when the time comes we shall submit the claim to restitute the property unjustly taken from them,"

An urgent and comprehensive operation is required in order to locate, collect, compile and document the maximum data on the private and communal Jewish property in Arab countries. The extensive public property that was abandoned and belonged to Jewish communities in ten states in the Arab world, some of them ancient, rich and flourishing communities, includes: Synagogues, religious schools (*'Talmud Torah'*), schools, *'Yeshivoth'*, orphanages, hospitals, cemeteries, communal real estate, hostels for the poor (*'Hekdesh'*), *'genizoth'*, archives, valuable Judaica articles, manuscripts and other priceless spiritual and cultural assets.

The private property of at least one hundred thousand paternal homes - plots of land, apartments and houses - some of them vast, magnificent mansions that were turned after the exit of the Jews into governors' palaces, embassies, public institutes etc.; plants, large and small businesses with their entire contents; bank accounts; valuables etc. - all of those are assets whose overall value is very difficult to assess for numerous reasons, not the least of which is the legal status in Arab countries, none of which has a system of indexation aimed at maintaining real currency value, and the nominal price of the abandoned property constitutes today, fifty years later, only a small percentage of its original value, but at today's market price it is estimated at billions of dollars.

The issue of Jewish property registration entails complex and complicated problems and numerous difficulties, and it becomes more acute with each passing day. As time passes many

details are forgotten, and many of those who could provide data have died: With regard to public property - only few remain of those who held public office in the communities in the countries of origin (rabbis, '*parnasim*', '*gabbaim*'^ teachers etc.) who possessed first-hand knowledge about the community assets. Furthermore: With the disappearance of the last of the survivors of a Jewish community in an Arab state who can produce proof of the community's ownership of its assets, they are transferred to the authorities in some of the countries,

Similar difficulties exist with regard to private property: with the decease of the proprietors, the linkage to the property of second and third-generation successors tends to weaken - due to their diminished knowledge of the details - added to the fact that due to the circumstances of the exit of Jews from Arab countries, most of them have been left without documents proving ownership of the property -as well as in the sense of their interest in it and their determination to restitute it. ""

Great national importance should therefore be attributed to special, comprehensive, urgent and resolute action in the matter of property registration. Efforts must be redoubled in order to surmount the above-mentioned obstacles - to rekindle the interest of those who possess information about the property as well as the owners themselves and their heirs and their readiness to cooperate and submit as much information as possible. This is the last opportunity to mobilize forces and resources in order to save the information about the property from oblivion and demand in the name of justice to realize the personal and collective rights of the Jews from Arab countries.

[A] Registration of Communal Property:

Any person who held public office in his country of origin (rabbis, community leaders, lawyers, administrators (*'parnasim'*), synagogue treasurers (*'gabbaim'*) and other public functionaries, in possession of first-hand information about public assets that were owned by the community such as synagogues, schools, 'yeshivoth', hospitals, orphanages, cemeteries, 'genizoth', communal real estate, etc. at his place of residence in his country of origin is requested to leave his personal details hereunder to enable us to send him a registration form:

[First Name:

[Surname:

[Full Address:

[Telephone No.: _____ Fax No.:

[E-Mail Address:

_____]

[B] Registration of Private Property:

Any person interested in registering private property owned by him or his family in the country of origin is requested to leave his personal details (First name and surname, full address. Tel./Fax No.) to enable us to send him/her a registration form;

Anyone who knows an owner of property in an Arab country who is unable to contact us on his own, is kindly requested to advise the property owner of the ongoing registration activity and give us his details (with his consent) to enable us to get in touch with him.

[C] Anyone connected to communal activity or a community center of Jews from Arab countries is kindly requested to inform the public in this framework about the ongoing registration activity and encourage people to get in touch with us via the internet or by mail, telephone or fax